

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Luke 24:36-42; I Cor. 15:36-50

"The Power of the Resurrection Body"

THE POWER OF...

Last month, in light of the passing of Billy Graham, the Lord led me to preach on the power of the Gospel. Billy Graham was a tremendous evangelist who took every moment to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. He understood its power. The power of the Gospel is the power to know that God loves you in Christ, that He has a wonderful plan and destiny for your life and that by simply humbling yourself before Him, repenting of your sin and trusting in His son Jesus Christ, He will unlock everything you need to experience abundant life in the here and now and eternal life in the age to come. It is why the Gospel is indeed called the good news – there is none any better!

And then on Palm Sunday, I was led to speak on the power of the cross. The power of the cross is the reality that God loves us so much He is willing to die for us. Jesus said, ***"Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends."*** (Jn. 15:13). Jesus laid down His life on the cross. But He did not only to show God's love but to show God's holiness and our sin. The cross confronts us with our sin. It calls us to a decision to let God deal with our sin or to let our sin rule us.

And then on Easter Sunday we looked at the power of the Resurrection. How it changes everything. It gets us off ourselves and our circumstances and onto God and His power. It reminds us that the same power that raised Jesus is the same power we have in Him through His Holy Spirit. And it means that everything we do in this life has significance. In other words, we are all headed to a judgment, an accounting of what we did in this life; and it can be one of great hope and expectation for we pass from judgment to life if we have allowed God to be God in our lives.

Well, today I want us to reflect on the power of the resurrection body of Jesus, and more specifically on the power of our own resurrection bodies. The truth is we are promised by God's Word to have the same type of resurrected body as Jesus has. In other words, our present bodies of flesh and blood will be transformed into glorious and powerful ones at the Return of Christ. This has tremendous implications not only for our present lives but for our future as well.

THE RESURRECTION BODY OF JESUS

One of the questions people often ask is what will we be like after we die? Will we be like a ghost? What type of body will we have? Will we be able to recognize our loved ones and others in heaven? While there are many opinions out there that serve as answers to these questions, the truth is God's Word provides us with clear answers. And how the Bible answers these questions tells us about why what we do now has such importance.

Please turn with me first, to **Luke 24:36-43**: ***"While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." 37But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your***

hearts? 39“See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; 43and He took it and ate it before them.”

In our passage from Luke’s Gospel we pick up from the road to Emmaus experience by two of Jesus’ disciples. They have seen the risen Jesus and are telling the others about their experience. At that moment, Jesus first appears to them. And what did we read in verse 37? **“They were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.”** What is a spirit? In that context they thought they were seeing a ghost. In other words, a vision or apparition of Jesus. But then notice what the Lord says? **“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39“See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”** Jesus is not a ghost, He has flesh and bones – he has a body. He not only shows them His body but the scars on His body. And then to really highlight the point, Jesus takes some fish and eats it!

Now is this body of Christ just a healed body of flesh and blood? No. It is a supernatural, all powerful body. It can instantly appear and vanish (see v. 31). It can enter and exit the three dimensional parameters of the natural world. It is not subject to disease, decay, or death. Notice, Jesus did not say flesh and blood, but flesh and bones. In other words, it has the same frame and look of His earthly body but it is not of the same substance. What gives our natural bodies life? Blood. If we lose too much blood, we will die. That is how Christ dies on the cross – from the loss of blood. But not with the resurrection body. How do we know there is this distinction?

WHAT WILL OUR RESURRECTION BODIES BE LIKE?

Please turn with me now to **1 Cor. 15:36-50**: **“But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” 36You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. 39All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. 40There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. 41There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.**

42So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. 50Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

So what do we learn about the resurrection body from the Apostle Paul? Paul uses the analogy of a seed and the plant or tree it becomes. Being buried in the ground, the seed seemingly is dead. It certainly

decomposes. No one would expect new life to come from a seed just by observation, but on that very spot new life emerges and a new plant much more beautiful than the seed itself emerges. It may not visibly resemble the seed at all, but it has the same molecular composition. It is a physical manifestation of the seed specific to the type of seed. You do not sow wheat and get barley! Paul is saying that our natural bodies are like seeds in comparison to the resurrected body! What comes up at the harvest is more beautiful than what was planted. Think of the tulip. Few things are as ugly as a tulip bulb, and yet such a “seed” produces one of the most beautiful of flowers.

Like seeds, Paul says our natural body *is perishable* (it will die), *it is sown in dishonor* – it is under the curse of sin; *it is weak* – think about how our bodies don’t do too well exposed to the elements of nature or the metal and machines of man; The truth is our natural bodies, even though they are a wonderful work of God’s creation – recall **Psalm 139** how we have been “***fearfully and wonderfully made***” – are at the same time vulnerable to many malfunctions because of the curse. In other words, if you have ever read a medical book on the body, there is a lot that can go wrong! We are feeble and frail and are breaking down in every conceivable way. And yet, what is God’s promise? Our bodies will be raised to new life, in glorious beauty, perfection, and power! For Paul goes on to say “*It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body*” – in other words a supernatural body that can inhabit the spiritual realm of eternity! What Paul is talking about is not reconstruction of our old bodies but of a total supernatural transformation of them.

For right now we *bear the image of the earthly, but then we will bear the image of the heavenly!* In fact, we are told by God’s Word that we will be like Christ Himself! **Philippians 3:20-21: “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*”** Did you catch the word Paul uses? “Transform!”

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

This is one of the many blessings we have to look forward to in God’s Kingdom. And yet, this reality also teaches us something about the present. For not only is it an affirmation that the body is good and not bad, and that the natural world in and of itself is good – recall that at the end of each day of Creation God saw that “***it was good***” and that at the end of creating the Creation itself God saw that it was “***very good.***” But it teaches us a fundamental principle in the Kingdom of God; namely that God will not give His power to His creatures if that power will be abused. In other words, if we can’t handle spiritual things and follow God in a natural weak and limited body, He will not bless us with a supernatural and powerful body.

Listen to how God’s Word puts it in other ways. Jesus said in **Lk. 16:10-12: “*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?*”** Our lives and our bodies are not really our own. They are God’s. So the requirement to trust God in the here and now as a basis for what you will receive in the hereafter makes perfect logical sense.

Notice what Paul says in **2 Cor. 5** which suggests a transition period between physical death and the putting on of the resurrected body at Christ’s Coming – “***For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... 6Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent***

from the Lord— 7for we walk by faith, not by sight— 8we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:1, 6-10)

So the resurrection in the body not only affirms that our present bodies will be transformed in Christ's likeness, but that what we do in our bodies now affects what we will receive in our resurrected bodies in the future. It also reveals that God is concerned with every aspect of life and that the transforming power of Christ affects every molecule in Creation! That is why Paul writes in **Romans 8** that *"the whole creation groans... longing for the revealing of the sons of God."* And it is one of the reasons why we have communion every week. During the consecration prayer, the bread and the wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. There is a transformation that affects the physical elements. Thus, Holy Communion is not only a remembrance of Christ's death but it is a remembrance of His resurrection. Notice how Jesus revealed Himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus earlier in **Luke 24**. They realized it was Jesus when He took the bread, broke it and blessed it! (**Lk. 24:30-31**). There is a reason why in **Acts 2:42** Luke tells us that there were four main components to the ministry of the early church – *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."*

But the Holy Communion also serves as a reminder of Christ's Return; for apart from His Return there will be no resurrection of our earthly bodies. It is why Paul goes on to say in verses 51-57, *"51Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

As the biblical scholar William Barclay notes in his commentary on the Corinthian letters, the resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates four sweeping realities that affect all of life: 1) truth is stronger than falsehood; 2) good is stronger than evil; 3) love is stronger than hate; and 4) life is stronger than death.

As a result, the believer does not have to fear the future; we do not have to be anxious or worry about things; we can rest in the hope we have in Christ. It is why Paul concludes this section of 1 Corinthians with the words, *58Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."*

We have work to do. This work is to be the work of the Lord and His Kingdom. And such work is never in vain. And that includes the suffering we experience in this life. Yes, there is power in our resurrection bodies, but the power is not in the bodies themselves; it is in our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit so that we can say, *O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!